La Semana Trágica and the limitations of citizenship for Jewish migrants in Early 20th Century Argentina

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La Semana Trágica: Argentina's First Pogrom

"Cavalrymen dragged old Jews through the streets of Buenos Aires naked, throwing them by their grey beards, their skin torn and scraped against the cobblestones, while the sabres and whips of the men on horseback struck intermittently on their bodies,"[1].

Historian José Mendelsohn describes the abuse directed at Argentine Jews in the aftermath of the *Semana Trágica* (Tragic Week). When news arose of a "Communist plot" to take over Argentina, the military, police, and civilians responded with the first pogroms the country had ever experienced.

Nativism and antisemitism had been brewing for many years in Argentina, exploding in January 1919, when working-class anarchists in Buenos Aires organized a general strike throughout the city. Though Jewish organizations were not primarily responsible for the strike there existed in Argentina, as well as elsewhere in the world, a rich tradition of Jewish unionism and activism. The popular antisemitic belief that "Eventually everyone will become Jewish, then socialistic, and then revolutionary,"[2] was the foundation for the subsequent scapegoating.

Mendelsohn, writing later, noted that the pogroms of Russia "were child's play compared to what happened"[3] that week. "At the end of the violent events, the leaders of Jewish organizations addressed an open letter to leading daily newspaper *La Prensa*, claiming that "one of the

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[1] Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 43.

[2] Schwartz, "Antisemitism in Modern Argentine Fiction"

[3] Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 43.

most elemental rights has been taken away from us, the Jews: the right to move freely through the streets of Buenos Aires.”’[4]

The lack of security and limits on citizenship hearkens to the crystallization within the community of what nativists had already propagated: a sense of shared collective responsibility for any minority group. “Jews learned that political activity was far more dangerous for them than it was for others and that the entire Jewish community could be attacked for the actions of anyone who had been born Jewish.”[5] Of course, Jews had been policing themselves since their arrival to Argentina[6], but the week of January 10, 1919 cemented for Jewish Argentines, newly arrived and long residents alike, that in order to survive they would be subject to a different set of rules than their Italian or Spanish counterparts.

With references to the February Revolution in 1917[7], fears of communism and liberalism alike, both nearly synonymous with Jews[8] [9], were stoked. The response was immediate and dras-

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[4] Nouwen, *Oy My Buenos Aires*, 43.

[5] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 83.

[6] See Zwi Migdal

[7] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 82. (Jewish trade unionism has a long history in Argentina. This, coupled with nativist panic, equated anarchists to Jews - denominated *Rusos*, or Russians.)

[8] "The number of Israelites in Buenos Aires and their neighborhood settlement pattern coincided closely with the number of Russian-born persons in the city. This identification was quickly made, and Jews came to be known as *rusos*.” - *Elkin, Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 58. (Some 85% of Jewish immigrants were Russian)

[9] In 17th century Peru, Portuguese and Jew were synonymous as well; New Christians were suspected to be secretly practicing Jews and faced violence as a result of the Inquisition.

tic. “The Irigoyen government, recovered from its initial paralysis[10], [and] called on patriotic Argentines to defend the country from the cadres of ‘Maximalist’ (bolshevik) foreigners,”[11].

“Chanting “Foreigners Out,” “Death to the Anarchists,” and “Death of the Jews,” members of groups such as *Los Defensores del Orden*, *La Guardia Blanca*, *and La Liga Patriotica Argentina* attacked Jewish working-class neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, vandalized and burned Jewish businesses and institutions, and beat and harassed individual Jews.”[12]

The Jewish population of Buenos Aires, Argentina constituted a sizable minority by the early 20th century. Settled primarily in the neighborhoods of Once and Villa Crespo, synagogues, Jewish organizations, kosher butcheries, and theaters advertising performances in Yiddish defined specific neighborhoods. Some of the organizations founded during this first wave of migration are still functioning. “The Chevra Kedusha, or burial society, was created in 1894, and in 1896, 30 Jews created the Unión Obrera Israelita, or Jewish Worker’s Union (later to become Bikur Joilim). Also, in 1896 a group of immigrants founded the first Talmud Torah (religious school for Jewish children), and in 1900 the Ezrah, a mutual aid society to help less-fortunate Jews, was established.”[13] Early Jewish settlement in Argentina was unique in that there existed a “lack of a significant Jewish community previous to mass arrival,”[14] as well as that at its start it was concentrated in the rural provinces.

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[10] The government under Hipólito Irigoyen, initially of radicals and unionists, quickly became more moderate in the face of economic stagnation.

[11]Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 43.

[12]Digzun, “Immigrants of a Different Religion”, 14.

[13] Nouwen, *Oy My Buenos Aires*, 29-30.

[14] Brodsky and Rein, *The New Jewish Argentines*, 7.

The Semana Trágica represents the divide amongst Argentine citizens as to who and what values constituted citizenship captured fear and stoked xenophobia. It also crystalized hate and antisemitism. The concept of "*argentinidad*," or collective Argentinian identity and rightful or legal citizenship, defined an ongoing debate over the place and value of immigration in the country. Those committed to the benefit of the nation and the development of their communal "argentinidad" were deemed acceptable. Within this identity, Jewish immigrants filled a liminal and problematic space; European and White, yet non-Christian and potentially dangerous. Fleeing dangers in Russia and increasing limits on work, property ownership and more, they settled in isolated agricultural settlements in rural Argentina and in the process, they became proxies for numerous social issues. The pattern of antisemitic violence that plagued Jews in Argentina paralleled the relationship between social and economic upheaval and pogroms in Russia.[15] This attests to the insecurity that surrounded the Jewish population and complicated their status as part of Argentina, speaking to their implicit and explicit exclusion from Argentine identity or argentidad that allowed frightened and xenophobic citizens to dehumanize and target them.

The Semana Trágica, a week of violent antisemitism and xenophobia, overwhelming in nature, is indicative of the difficulties surrounding citizenship and nationalism. It shows the complicated relationship that define what it means to be a citizen and how national identity is expressed. It was impossible for the Jews to achieve citizenship in Argentina; and when nationalists refused to recognize their status, it became clear just how easily citizenship can be taken away.

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[15] Grosfeld, Sakalli, Zhuravskaya, "Middlemen Minorities and Ethnic Violence".

The story of Jewish migration to Argentina demonstrates how insecurity drives people to make decisions that are not necessarily in their best interest. Jewish life in Latin America (and earlier in Spain) is marked by antisemitism and hatred. Yet facing total loss in Europe, the Jews chose to leave.

Arrivals

Gernchunoff. Eichelbaum. Kessel. Dickmann. These are the surnames of writers, politicians, physicians, farmers, and immigrants.[16] Today Jews make up approximately 0.75% of Argentine society, but from 1889 to 1919, during the largest wave of immigration to Argentina, they constituted 6%[17] of the arrivals from Europe. During this period approximately 70%[18] of Argentina's population was foreign-born, but even among the outsiders, Jewish immigrants were aliens. This is the story of a group that was by nature an exception.

Argentina still defines itself by contradictions. It is self-described as a nation of immigrants, yet that very immigration was a method for colonization and genocide of indigenous people and a plan to turn the country white[19]. It is in this contradictory and violent mass of intention that the status of Jews as migrants and residents constantly shifted. The law existed and immigration was legal, but Federal rules only went so far and could not compete with societal views.

For the purposes of this project, I will focus specifically on the migration of Eastern European, Ashkenazi Jews to Argentina and the fluctuations in their identities in conjunction with

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[16] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 61-62.

[17] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 27.

[18] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics.*

[19] This practice, known as "blanqueamiento", was common in many Latin American and Oceanic countries. It appears most starkly in Article 25 of Argentina's Constitution.

the law and society. The Ashkenazi constituted the majority of Jewish immigrants during the height of migration to Argentina[20], and while their story paints an exceedingly complex and contradictory picture of how status, race, ethnicity, and religion are interpreted by governments and citizens, they were not the only Jewish community in Argentina. However, as a result of their numbers and questionable whiteness, they present an example of just how arbitrary the capricious the gatekeepers of identity can be.

"The year 1889 marked the beginning of mass Jewish migration to Argentina, when the first boatload of Jews arrived from Eastern Europe and sought to create agricultural colonies in the nation's interior. Those on the first boat, the *Weser*, invited by the Argentine government, arrived with the tools for the furtherance of their religion—Torah scrolls, religious books, a rabbi, and a teacher, as well as Jews interested in starting new lives as farmers."[21] These first families purchased land to farm collectively, part of the plan of colonization created with the support of the Argentine government. However, upon their arrival, they were initially denied entry to the country and were described as being '"harmful elements,' having been expelled from their home country."[22] This decision was eventually reversed, and the *Weser* went on to make several trips between Eastern Europe and Argentina, transporting Jews from unlivable conditions to uncertainty.

Upon arrival, the majority of Jewish migrants began their new lives in agricultural colonies. Though now considered to be a drastic underestimate, the 1895 national census counted

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[20] 85% - Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 58.

[21] Nouwen, *Oy My Buenos Aires*, 25-26.

[22] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 57.

6,085 Israelites (Jews) in Argentina, of which 5,890 were foreign-born and only 753 lived in the city of Buenos Aires. The rest populated the provinces of Entre Ríos, Santa Fé, and the province of Buenos Aires.[23] [24] The number of Jews increased over the next ten years, until the evidence of Jewish life in Argentina was clearly noticeable, augmented by the eventual movement of Jews to the city of Buenos Aires from the provinces.

At the time of the *Weser*'s original docking, the oldest congregation in Argentina was also the only one. Congregación Israelita de la Republica Argentina was founded in 1868 during a period when to be a practicing Jew in Argentina was functionally illegal. It was nearly impossible to register a birth without a baptism or a marriage that did not take place in a Catholic Church. By the late 1880s however, the secularism[25] of the country was being promoted in support of development. According to Polish immigrant and founding member of *Avangard*[26], Pinie Wald, Jews were treated "'not as Jews but as deaf and dumb and suffering immigrants.'"[27]

For the Jewish immigrants who by nature did not fall into the strict categories of what was ideal according to the writers of Argentina's Constitution, the general language of Article 25, which permitted open borders for Europeans, allowed for their relatively easy movement and entry. Between the years 1870-1930, with the highest rates of immigration, Jews represented

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[23] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 58.

[24] Asking the question of religion in the census conducted by the government indicates a recognition of the Jewish population in Argentina, if not an acceptance of them.

[25] Secularism was written into parts of the law, but not entirely enacted. Even those who had little to no understanding of Argentine law were skeptical of how it would be applied.

[26] Jewish Socialist labor organization in Argentina, one of the targets of la Semana Trágica in 1919

[27] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 59.

around 130,000 of the 6.5 million migrants,[28] or approximately 2 percent of the total. In spite of these relatively large numbers, there were several factors that set these newcomers apart upon their arrival. First, they did not come from the Western and Northern European countries that Alberdi idealized. Secondly, they were not Protestant, nor Catholic, nor even Christian. Thirdly, their whiteness, debated in the scientific racism that had already taken hold, was not expressly apparent to other Argentines, though their European origins were.

The effect of the law on general society developed following both the writers' intent and the actual contents. For the Argentine government, Jewish immigrants were able to settle in part because of a technicality, statistically a blip in the face of mass efforts to further colonize and Europeanize the country.

The experience of Jewish immigrants in Argentina highlights that movers do not necessarily seek a better life, in contrary to many assumptions concerning migration. For these movers, travel to Argentina was more about escaping the lack of possibility, or insecurities, they were trying to escape. However, insecurities at home can be replaced by newer insecurities that define arrival and settlement[29]. Insecurity upon arrival can be attributed to a variety of factors, including economic instability, but the experiences of the Jews in Argentina are dominated by the constant questioning of the "argentinidad" of these migrants and their families by elites and society, creating a cycle of uncertainty that plays out in violent ways for those most vulnerable, as we see here. Through subsequent interpretation, the discourse itself casts doubt on the belonging of Jewish immigrants and their status becomes even more uncertain.

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[28] Digzun, "Immigrants of a Different Religion", 1.

[29] Cohen and Sirkeci, *Cultures of Migration*

The Foundations of Immigration

Jewish migration to the Argentina was virtually nonexistent[30] prior to 1889, when the S.S. Wesser arrived for the first time to the shores of Argentina carrying 824 Russian Jews to populate the agricultural colony of Moisés Ville. In spite of relative freedom of movement and a constitution that at least nominally accepted all European immigrants, the Jewish community in Argentina paled in comparison of that in the United States. The reasons for this are twofold: first, the conditions in Europe had not yet become unlivable. Secondly, Jewish life in Argentina, as well as the majority of the former Spanish colonies in the Americas, was so far outside the law that it was more or less illegal.

Much of this disdain emerged as remnants from the Inquisition. In 1492, with the utter desolation of Jewish life in Spain (and subsequently Portugal in 1497), many refugees and their descendants eventually turned to the "New World". Though life in Spanish colonies was virtually impossible, with suspected *Judaizers* tortured and imprisoned, it is assumed that some *conversos*[31] did in fact migrate; however, their need for anonymity meant only the Inquisition's records remained. Portuguese Brazil was more forgiving of Jewish refugees and immigrants, as any merchant or landowner with adequate funds could legally assimilate. This was in part a result of the different relationship Portuguese monarchs had with their Jewish subjects, as detailed by Costigan, and fluctuated over the course of colonization[32]. However, it was not until the Dutch con-

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[30]Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*

[31] Jewish converts to Christianity, often suspected of practicing Judaism in secret

[32] Costigan, "The Rise of the Modern Inquisition in Portugal and Brazil"

quered several cities on the Northeast coast of Brazil that Jewish life could exist openly.[33] Large scale Jewish migration to Brazil did not exist until the 1900s, but Jews are estimated to have made up as much as 20 percent of white population of the colonial capital of Salvador.[34]

In order to examine the effects of the law and its effects on the lives of these early Jewish migrants, it is necessary to understand the law itself. Argentina has long been considered a prime destination for immigration, previously a well-used European destination, but more recently from the Asia and Africa, as well as from other South American countries. This status as a destination is a direct result of policy that is ingrained in the constitution of the nation, established in 1853. Article 25 states that "The Federal Government will encourage European immigration; and will not restrict, limit, nor tax the entry of any foreigner into the territory of Argentina who comes with the goal of working the land, bettering industry, or introducing or teaching sciences or the arts."[35]

This clause, written by Juan Bautista Alberdi, was born from his belief that "Gobernar es poblar," or "To govern is to populate."[36] Alberdi's specific goal of increasing European immigration was one of several programs in Latin American countries known as "whitening laws," or the process of "*blanqueamiento*," to bring European ideals of civilization through the saturation of primarily indigenous and black communities with whiteness. Alberdi himself defined the optimal European immigrant as white Anglo-Saxon and Protestant from Great Britain or France - though

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[33] Religious freedom had been granted to Jews in the Netherlands as well as Dutch colonies. The first synagogue in Brazil was founded in Recife under Dutch rule.

[34] Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables*, 14.

[35] Argentine Constitution, art. 25.

[36] "Juan Bautista Alberdi".

he himself was born in Spain - and the others involved in the fashioning of the constitution agreed with his view. The question of where Jewish immigrants fit into this process defines their liminality. They were not the optimal European immigrant, nor were they undesirable. It can be said that Jewish immigrants contributed to the blanqueamiento process, especially through agricultural settlements, in that they were in part accepted as part of the colonization process, but as a population they were the subject of tension over the boundaries of argentinidad. These tensions can be compared to the barriers that separated German Jews from non-Jewish society[37], as examined by Judd.

This same Constitution that offered a veneer of secularism also failed to hide the preference for Catholicism underneath. Though Article 25 presented a technicality by which Jews could legally enter Argentina, laws in the country were not so forgiving. There are records of Jewish parents in Buenos Aires suing to register the existence of their children without a baptism as late as 1877, evidence of the difficulties they faced as they lived outside the Christian norm. "Ethnocentrism manifested itself in the slow pace at which the Catholic monopoly of civil matters dissipated, despite legislation intended to accord religious toleration. Even the provincial government of Buenos Aires, the most progressive of the provinces, never activated provisions of an 1833 law providing for the registration of births, deaths, and marriages in non-Catholic families."[38]

For 19th century Jews in Europe, their religious and ethnic status had long determined their marginality. Their identities were not acknowledged as anything other than alien, and they

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[37] Judd, *Contested Rituals*, 6.

[38] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics,* 35-36.

were then relegated to the outskirts of the law. This set of circumstances held true in Argentina, and rendered migration not illegal, but rather impossible. The markers of Jewish religious and social life were stifled by regulation; marriages that did not take place in a Catholic Church were unrecognized, permits to build synagogues within the city were virtually nonexistent, and Jews were often buried in the "Dissident section" of the Municipal Cemetery.

Nicholas de Genova characterizes how it is possible to be legal and illegal at the same time: "There are also those "illegalities," furthermore, that more generally pertain to the heightened policing directed at the bodies, movements, and spaces of the poor, and especially those racialized as non-white."[39] The results of this legal invisibility presaged the idea that legality is a sociolegal status as introduced by Golash-Boza. [40]For the few Jews living in Argentina at the time - almost exclusively in Buenos Aires - were simultaneously welcomed and shunned.

During this first wave of migration Jews are othered, but also acceptable as white, at least conditionally. Though some of the sentiments behind the Inquisition remained, albeit diluted, they were considered preferable to existing Black and Indigenous populations. Scientific racism had fully taken root in Latin America, and the hierarchy of desirability in Argentina was such: Anglo-Saxon and Germanic immigrants were held superior, with Spaniards and Italians accepted - "as Catholics and Latins were less likely to disrupt existing institutions"[41] - and European Jews, Arabs, and Asians disregarded. They were able to enter on a technicality, and there they waited for acceptance with few, if any, protections or even allowances made.

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[39] De Genova, "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality'".

[40] Golash-Boza, *Forced Out and Fenced In*

[41] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 26.

With this in mind, the lag in Jewish migration to Argentina is no longer a mystery. Perhaps it is too much to assume that European Jews were entirely aware of the limitations that came with entry into Argentina. However, there did exist a reluctance to trust the openness of Argentine society. The manifestation of this was recorded by the Argentine ambassador in Milan in 1881 when he was tasked by the government to examine the situation of Jews in czarist Russia in terms of how to convince them to emigrate. "His efforts were unsuccessful, probably for two reasons: the underdevelopment of the Argentine economy, as compared with that of the United States; and the fear that the religious toleration offered by the Constitution of 1853 might lack substance."[42] It can therefore be inferred that Jews in Europe were aware of the possible differences between the law and its interpretation.

It is not until 1888, when Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and his forces of secularism emerge victorious in Argentine politics, that the first wave of Jewish migration begins. For the Jewish immigrants who by nature did not fall into the strict categories of what was ideal according to Alberdi, the general language of the Constitution allowed for their relatively easy entry.

The mission statement of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), which facilitated Jewish migration to the agricultural colonies, characterizes the desperation with which many Jews left their homes in Europe and came to settle in Argentina in Article 3: "[To] Facilitate and promote the emigration of Israelites from countries of Europe and Asia, where they are restricted by special laws and deprived of political rights, to regions of the world where they could enjoy

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[42] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics,* 57.

these and other human rights. To that effect, the Association proposes to establish agricultural colonies in various regions of North and South America, as well as other regions."[43]

In his founding of the JCA, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a German financier and philanthropist, strove to create a haven of Jewish life safe from persecution. He believed that, given Argentina's openness to immigrants willing to work the land and the desperation of migrants to leave Europe, the two forces would be enough to establish respectability for the new arrivals. Though he was eventually proven wrong, "[Baron Maurice de Hirsh] hoped that 'the time will come when I shall have from three to four thousand Jews flourishing on their homesteads in the Argentine, peaceful and respected citizens, a valuable source of national wealth and stability. Then we shall be able to point to them and contrast them with their breather who have been demoralized by persecution What will the Jew-haters say then?""[44]

Identity was not the primary concern for these migrants. Finding a place where they could live, raise their children, and exist in peace was. Therefore, the separation between Jews and other migrants or criollos[45] that allowed for the violence of the Semana Trágica made it all the more harmful.

Golash-Boza addresses this distinction in *Forced Out and Fenced In*: "Legal status is, of course, invisible."[46] By this meaning, it is impossible to tell someone's legality by their appearance. However, in a society that is on the lookout for outsiders, any deviation from the accept-

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[43] Friedenburg, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho*, 37.

[44] Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 2.

[45] Native-born Argentines

[46] Golash-Boza, *Forced Out and Fenced In*, 94.

able norm can undermine and disrupt the system. Though Jewish immigrants were set apart from their Italian or Spanish counterparts on first glance by their language and dress, they fit the requirement of white European enough to be allowed entry. Apparently though, they did not pass well enough to satisfy the gatekeepers of argentinidad. It is worth noting that they may never have been able to achieve this outside of relinquishing their Jewish identities.

The separation between the Argentine Jewish community and the national struggle is evident in both the violence of that week, and the official response to it. A Jewish deputation was sent to President Hipólito Yrigoyen asking him to denounce the antisemitic acts and pledge additional protection for Jews and Jewish neighborhoods. The police were ordered to cease their harassment and additional patrols were put in place, ostensibly for safety. Nevertheless, President Yrigoyen would add a caveat to this aid: he told the delegation, reeling from loss of life and security, that they should have appealed to him on behalf of Argentine citizens, not Argentine Jews. Understanding that Jewish communities faced the brunt of the violence, and for some groups were the sole target, this distinction separated them from other immigrant communities, thoroughly othering them. While all hyphenated identities were discouraged in favor of assimilation, those for whom their identities held the starkest visible differences from the white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian ideal would not be welcomed as Argentines until they relinquished it. “In official and even non-official circles, a prevailing attitude thus emerged: while Argentine statesmen genuinely welcomed European immigrants, they rejected any cultural notion of *doble nacionalidad* (dual nationality) or *doble lealtad* (dual loyalty). Although suspicion of hyphenated identities was not

uncommon in other countries at that time, in Argentina it marked civic society for decades to come despite (or in spite of) the nation's palpable heterogeneous mix."[47]

A familiar trope that has long been associated with Jews was the assumption that the newly arrived immigrants would never unseat their loyalty to other Jews in favor of the nation. Juan B. Justo, Argentine politician and then-president of the Socialist Party, wrote "Little sympathy can be inspired in us, a people of mixed origins, by the fruitless effort of one of the smallest groups that has entered the country to maintain themselves as a race apart, when we absorb and allow ourselves to be absorbed, by, in a general mixture, the great immigratory masses."[48]

Preconceived notions of what that identity entailed, as well as general nativist thought that was fueled by antisemitic tropes of power-hungry Jews, attempted to violently remove Jewish Argentines and Jewish immigrants from the fabric of nationality altogether, in spite of their numerous contributions to Argentine politics and society up to this point.

Legality and Identity

When Chaim Kinderman applied for permission to immigrate to Argentina from Russia in 1891, he was one of around 20,000 Jews expelled from Moscow to the Pale of Settlement.[49] Having been stripped of security in his home, he and seven of his family members sought a country that was accepting European immigration, hoping to renew their status as legal citizens. Though Russia had othered him by law, he believed that Argentina would not.

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[47] Digzun, "Immigrants of a Different Religion," 11.

[48] Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires*, 44.

[49] Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 1.

According to Cecilia Menjívar and Daniel Kanstroom in *Constructing Immigrant 'Illegality': Critiques, Experiences, and Responses*, "Illegality is a peculiarly powerful but amorphous legal concept. It marks a specific allegation by government enforcement agents, investigators, and prosecutors of a particular type of conduct."[50] Menjívar and Kanstroom go on to explain that the evolution of the concept of illegality and the laws which enforce it are ethically and reasonably ambiguous when they concern the legal status of individuals rather than actions. Legality and illegality therefore become reference points that permeate all aspects of daily life, from thoughts to actions to surroundings. Furthermore, what is legal, and illegal is malleable and influenced by personal, social, and historical assumptions.

For immigrant Jews arriving in Argentina, citizenship was not dictated by the state, but rather originated from it. The laws that decreed their ability to enter and leave the country determined their movement and how their neighbors and communities would treat them. As described by Golash-Boza, that sphere of legality is only one factor determining status. It extends beyond the people it refers to and applies to the surrounding society. If one is legal then the others are illegal. If one belongs, then the others do not. The law and ideas of belonging become a means of separation and "othering". The result becomes alienation that is not unique to the Jewish experience in Argentina but is universal to immigrants and refugees who cross frontiers.

The legality of Chaim Kinderman and his family was a sociolegal condition that they sought, while illegality was imposed on them and interpreted by both governments and societies. "When we think of illegality, it is important to remember that this is a status that people can

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[50] Menjívar and Kanstroom, *Constructing Immigrant 'Illegality'*, I.

move in and out of."[51] An excerpt of a letter to Congress by then-Ambassador to Russia Charles Emory Smith describes the circumstances of Kinderman's, and other Jews', security: "Though destitute of technical right, their residence has had the sanction of long toleration and has acquired the sacredness of an established home."[52]

There are two takeaways from these remarks: first the Jewish presence in Moscow was only tolerated, not accepted, and second the lack of a home lent itself to the Jewish temporality and liminality, and this insecurity pushed the migration to Argentina. The Jews who left Russia for Argentina were not reaching for greater heights, they were fighting to survive after having their security effectively stripped. Argentina was a country where, with relatively open borders for Europeans, they might be able to achieve that tolerance again.

Liminality 101

"The ultimate libel was that the Jew was, and always would remain, an alien who did not belong to the Argentine nation. Even the agricultural colonies did not establish Jews as Argentines, for these, it was alleged, were no more than a plot to create Palestine in Argentina."[53] This combination of nativism and antisemitism was so potent because Argentine Jews were at this point mostly foreign-born, leaving them highly vulnerable.

Mendelsohn's comments regarding the Semana Trágica should be taken in the context of worsening antisemitism in Russia. There, Jews were confined to the Pale of Settlement; they existed in a state of semi-legality, restricted in movement and rights. Additionally, the Russian Civil

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[51] Golash-Boza, *Forced Out and Fenced In*, xi.

[52] Smith, "The Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the First Session of the Fifty-Second Congress. 1891-'92"

[53] Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*, 83.

War led to the increase in pogroms as the White Army convinced itself of nefarious Jewish influence on the rise of communism. “Its slogan was ‘Strike at the Jews and save Russia!’”[54]

In contrast, Jewish immigrants to Argentina were not citizens, and they were not welcomed with open arms. Nevertheless, they were tolerated. Argentina had not experienced widespread antisemitic violence until the Semana Trágica, and it would not again until liberalism gave way to authoritarianism and the brutal implementation of conservative values.

That is not to say that Jewish immigrants were celebrated upon arrival to Argentina. As a people fleeing persecution, and one that was certainly unwelcome in their countries of origin, Jewish immigrants were not only outside of the expectations of those encouraging European migration, it is safe to say that they were likely not even considered.

Here, as is familiar in cases of Jewish study and migration, tolerance was conditional. Kessel Schwartz describes the manifestation of expectations for Jewish immigrants through literature and popular culture: “In a few cases, Argentines speak favorably about Jews and their efforts to conform to Argentine modes of behavior, but for the most part, friendship, decidedly ambivalent, involves the implicit understanding that acceptance means becoming more Argentina and less Jewish.”[55]

For those gatekeeping "argentinidad" that would separate hyphenated identities, like President Yrigoyen, there was a path to acceptance that, though decidedly inaccessible to the "other", was advertised. "The idea that exclusion and racial discrimination are eventually displaced by

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[54] “Russia Virtual Jewish History Tour”

[55] Schwartz, “Antisemitism in Modern Argentine Fiction”

inclusion and assimilation"[56] was - and is - fervently embraced, paving the way for those targeted by violence to be blamed for their own victimization.

In spite of leaving their homes in Russia to escape insecurity, Jewish arrivals to Argentina found themselves mired in a new kind of insecurity as the Argentinian economy slowed. World War I brought a number of crises, and layoffs, rising prices, and falling wages abounded. In response, workers staged strike after strike between 1917 and 1918. At this time, "The city of Buenos Aires contained about one-fourth of the nation's voters, most of whom belonged to the working class,"[57] and upon whom President Yrigoyen and the political elite relied upon for election.

However, "Politicians who appealed to the labor vote trod a very fine line. As the urban working class grew along with economy, the workers became increasingly aware of their second-class citizenship. Even immigrant workers did not accept this status."[58] Anyone not part of urban labor circles feared anarchist uprising - which inspired the 1902 Residency Law[59] - and with 25% of the nation's capital as a potential opposition force, immediate action was necessary. Enter, Jews.

Outside of the country's Black and Indigenous populations, Jewish immigrants were the most visible minority in Buenos Aires. Especially with migrants still pouring into Argentina and movement from the agricultural colonies into the city, nativists and antisemites were already ner-

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[56] Golash-Boza, *Forced Out and Fenced In*, 31.

[57] Brown, *Brief History of Argentina*, 170-171.

[58] Brown, *Brief History of Argentina*, 171.

[59] Anyone guilty of stirring up political strife was liable to be deported

vous. In these times of uncertainty, elites needed someone to blame would be able to capture the rage of the masses as well as the growing middle class.

The Semana Trágica was not the first antisemitic event in Argentine history, and it would not be the last, but it is perhaps one of the most infamous. Jewish immigrants existed in a vulnerable, liminal space because they were Jewish and immigrants, and therefore seditious. Argentine nationalism was threatened by their apparent refusal to renounce their Jewishness and assimilate, sentiments that can be in part traced to remnants of the Inquisition. "As early as 1908, Jewish schools in the agricultural colonies of Entre Ríos had been attacked by Catholics,"[60] for fear that they would undermine the nation-building project.[61]

As the colonies failed, "[They] did not end up as prosperous trading hubs in the rural provinces—most colonists eked out a meager living and sent their children to larger towns and cities for educational and professional opportunities."[62] This visibility, and its implication of a failure on the Jewish part to assimilate to Argentine society, was explicitly blamed for the violence: "Quick to condemn the atrocities and to shower the Jewish community with genuine sympathy and praise, Argentine politicians suggested, both directly and indirectly, to Jewish leaders and members of the community that it was imperative for Jewish Argentines to culturally integrate themselves more fully into Argentine society lest they wish the nefarious recent events to repeat themselves."[63]

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[60] Schwartz, "Antisemitism in Modern Argentine Fiction"

[61] Scott FitzGerald and Cook-Martín, *Culling the Masses*.

[62] Nouwen, *Oy My Buenos Aires*, 27.

[63] Digzun, "Immigrants of a Different Religion", 15-16.

Conclusion

The conditions of marginality and liminality are not an example of Argentinian or Jewish exceptionalism, but rather serve as an example among many of the pervasiveness of xenophobia and the symbiotic relationship between the law and society. From the Muslim Ban in the U.S. to the "White Australia Policy", immigration law can often be taken as an example of who is deemed acceptable and who is not. For those who fall outside of these standards, few protections wait. Instead, insecurity and distrust shape their experiences.

No matter within Argentina specifically or elsewhere, these themes still thrive in present society. For recipients of temporary protected status here in the U.S., liminality governs all. Like the Jews in Argentina, they are let in on a technicality, not welcomed but reluctantly accepted. Tolerated until their home countries are "stable" enough to return, they are not offered citizenship for themselves, but their children may receive it. They become more and more visible, and therefore more vulnerable. Like other immigrant populations, especially those non-white and non-Christian, this lends to their scapegoating and demonization, while their belonging becomes debated.

The case of Jewish immigration to Argentina is not unique, but it is exceptional. Here is a population that, by all rights, should not have ended up in Argentina. No one was prepared for their arrival, but they came anyways, not following logic but chasing security, and immediately failing. Tolerance then is not a model for rule, because it is always conditional, and can always end. In this instance we see the failure of Jewish immigrants to assimilate to Argentine standards a task that would prove impossible, and in response we witness the revocation of tolerance in exchange for violence.

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